



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

MORE FROM OUR TEXTBOOKS

FRANCIS D. CURTIS
Franklin High School, Portland, Oregon

It is generally admitted that America is well supplied with elementary- and secondary-school textbooks. School authorities are confronted with the task of selecting the best in each subject from a formidable array of texts, most of them excellent in content, presentation, and mechanical features. Our whole teaching system has for generations evolved around the textbook, until any attempt to break away from the old régime must combat all the potent factors of conservatism and custom.

It cannot be denied that to a great extent our system of textbooks is wasteful and in many respects may even be deserving of scorn and condemnation. Every decade sees the publishing of scores of texts, carefully written and edited, expensively illustrated, attractive and worthy in every respect, which, failing to achieve recognition in the form of adoptions, are financially unsuccessful and hence soon slip into the discard, unappreciated and practically unknown. The fact that each adoption can place only one text inevitably compels the publishers to bring into the fight their best resources in advertising, salesmanship, and influence. Too often as a result, an inferior book wins out over superior ones, and since it alone dominates the particular field in that locality for a term of years, the results from the standpoint of education are deplorable.

One solution of this difficulty is to use more of the available texts; the detrimental influence of one poor text among several adopted can in this way be made a practically negligible factor. Then, too, no one text presents all phases of a subject with equal strength; why, therefore, restrict the teacher to the use of only one text?

Is it not possible that a change in the function of our textbooks, making them *a* tool instead of *the* tool, could bring about a considerable improvement in our teaching efficiency? Why not supplant the present textbook method by introducing the syllabus plan?

In urging the more general use of the syllabus, it is not with the thought that this method is in any sense a new departure. It is by no means the only substitute for the textbook plan or the best substitute. But the idea of a wider use of the syllabus method is worthy of thoughtful consideration, provided it can be shown to be superior to the present textbook method, and provided also that its introduction is entirely practicable.

What are some of the arguments most frequently heard in support of our present system of textbook teaching in those sporadic cases in which discussion has evoked them? A textbook is definite; it is maximally convenient; it safeguards the underprepared teacher, making it possible for her to direct the class over the required work with considerable assurance; it is economical of time and effort, on the part of both the teacher and the pupil; it makes a uniform course for a city or a whole state.

But let us consider these arguments one by one. May not the very convenience and definiteness of the textbook be much more of a disadvantage than an advantage? May we not justly ascribe to the *convenience* of the textbook a major share of the blame for the almost universal type of assignment which prevails: "For tomorrow, take to page 76." "Take the next fifty lines," etc.—convenient for the teacher but stultifying in its insidious influence on her work and deadening to the enthusiasm of the class. May not the *definiteness* of the textbook method, moreover, be equally detrimental in its influence on teacher and pupil? Unconscientious teachers, if there be any such, might rest content with the mere knowledge of the contents of the one book used, while in the case of the pupils the use of a single textbook in a course implants and imbeds the idea that the book used is *the* authority and that all that is necessary in the mastery of any subject is to know "what the book says."

It is doubtless lamentably true that there are weak teachers in our schools, and it is also reasonably certain that their path is smoothed somewhat by the use of the textbook method. But might it not be justly objected that a teacher, weak in preparation, receives little or no stimulus toward improving her preparation when she is obliged to read up the day's recitation material in only

one book? The statement has been heard from teachers, "I can keep ahead of a class *in the book*"; in many cases this is about all she needs to do and all she does.

The textbook is economical of time and effort on the part of both teacher and pupil. May the truth of this statement not depend in part at least on the point of view; are we teaching facts or are we educating? If the absorption by the pupils of the subject-matter contained in the assignment were the only end desired, doubtless the strength of this argument would be paramount. But might it not be said with equal justice that in a large number of cases this same economy of time effectually kills effort or most of it on the part of both the teacher and the pupil? This statement is not meant to imply that the teacher should not be helped to prepare her work with all legitimate conservation of time, and both she and her pupils must be safeguarded against confusing the idea of time with that of wasted time and of effort with that of wasted effort.

The textbook method makes uniform the course of study. But how uniform do we want to make the course of study? One sometimes hears the criticism that our education tends both in the teaching and in the product toward "peas in a pod." It is objected that for the sake of proper standards it is necessary that there be a uniform course. Doubtless this is true within reasonable limits in a large system where it is inevitable that all of the teaching corps will not have the proper training to uphold adequate standards without a rigid uniformity of course content. But is the textbook method the only way of achieving this very necessary end, or even the best way?

Let us now consider whether the arguments given in favor of the textbook method may not equally or even more properly apply to a syllabus plan in which the course content is outlined from several or many textbooks. Perhaps we may not justly claim for the syllabus method the same degree of convenience that belongs to the single text; the necessary voluminousness of the former prevents this. But if we agree that mere convenience in a classroom tool may prove a serious objection to its use, in that it may narrow rather than broaden the outlook, we may not turn our backs upon the very positive advantages offered by the newer

method in this respect. A "syllabus teacher" is a growing teacher, forced out of the rut and stimulated to broader preparation. The facile course implement at her command invites the introduction of the problem or the project method with supervised study (by this latter is not meant the type in which during a part of the period the class dawdles while the teacher "rests"), encouraging by its exactions more careful, constructive assignments.

From the student's standpoint, the influence of the syllabus is even more salutary. He studies his work from several texts, getting thereby the stimulus of different styles, different orders and methods of presentation, and different points of view. In respect to this latter, it sometimes occurs, even in very elementary subjects, that two textbooks will flatly contradict each other on some point in a lesson, thereby bringing home to the pupil early in his educational work the supremely valuable fact that even recognized authorities differ and that no single utterance on any subject from whatever source should be taken as final.

As for the teacher weak in preparation, is our problem to help her to "get by" with her weakness or to help her to "get over" it? The failure of the textbook method, that it in itself does not demand that she broaden her knowledge of the subject, can surely not apply to the syllabus. The emergency would indeed be extreme because of which an insufficiently trained teacher would face her class without having previously covered all of the assignments of the syllabus for the day.

In a system or portion of it where the corps is composed entirely of strong teachers, uniformity of course is neither usual nor desirable. A strong, thoroughly grounded teacher, even when confined to a single textbook, seldom holds herself to following the order of the text; if this is the *limit* by which she may exercise her judgment and originality, at least she will do this much. But given a syllabus, even though she may not have been permitted the privilege of making it herself, she will tend to adapt the course to the individuality of the class or of the pupils.

In case it is not desirable to allow the teachers to make their own syllabi, it will prove entirely as practicable for a competent textbook committee to lay out a syllabus as to select a text.

A textbook adopted for a term of years, especially if it is re-adopted, renders an up-to-date presentation of the subject extremely difficult if not impossible. But the syllabus plan offers every opportunity for introducing new facts and methods as soon as they appear, whether in textbooks or in periodicals.

There are a number of other values of the syllabus method which raise it above the textbook plan. Its *elasticity*, making it a convenient vehicle for the use of problems, projects, supervised study, adaptation for individual and class differences, and elimination of obsolete material, also makes possible courses for which as yet there have been no texts written, as for example, general science for girls as distinct from household physics and chemistry, commercial general science, and biological sociology.

The syllabus method is one by which we *develop ideals* of study and a clearer conception of what education really means. From the beginning the pupil is brought to realize that there are always "more worlds to conquer"; he is trained to search for his information in one source after another, always reaching out, always extending his horizon, and at the same time gaining the conviction that however far he may pursue his book investigations, there are always vaster unexplored fields beyond.

It is sometimes stated that the textbook method is best for immature pupils. But before this statement can be accepted, the term "immature" must be defined. Surely children of high-school or even junior high school age are not too "immature" to be trained in the use of wider authority than one text. On the contrary, though the initial progress be slow, it is essential that training in searching for information more widely than within the narrow limits of any single text be begun at least this early; to put off the emancipation from the old method is to handicap the development of the pupil during these all important formative years.

A strong and successful teacher recently stated that in her opinion the textbook method was superior to the syllabus plan in the case of a lazy or poor class, because a single text gave her definite limits of work to which she could hold her class rigidly. Had she the correct conception of the possibilities of a syllabus course? Would it not be possible to make a syllabus course as rigidly definite

as the needs of any class might demand and at the same time to give the pupils the benefits of its broader training and culture?

Proponents of the textbook method state that it is excellent for "drill." Surely it is, but this could scarcely be stated as an important argument in favor of a method until the more important question of how much drill is necessary and desirable in any given course is settled. Doubtless much of the time now expended on drill could be much better utilized in browsing further, with gain to the class in knowledge content, and surely in the very important factor of stimulated and retained interest.

What does the textbook method do for the exceptional pupil? How much can a busy teacher, with large classes, do with such a method to prevent the brighter ones from becoming demoralized through having too little to keep their brains active, from finding all but the barest effort unnecessary in keeping pace with the class and the textbook? The syllabus plan offers a very happy solution of this most important problem. By its use the interest of the superior students may be aroused, and encouragement is given for the brighter ones to explore the seductive by-paths which lead off from the main discussion.

Another all important and valuable socializing function of the syllabus method not shared to nearly so great an extent by the textbook plan is the *fostering* of *emulation* between students in the same class. It is a frequently observed occurrence in a syllabus course that the class leaders, without special urging on the teacher's part, are stimulated to read and study on, each with the hope of getting a broader knowledge of the course content and hence a more conspicuously oracular place in rank, as recognized by class members. Even slower pupils have the frequently enjoyed opportunity of unearthing some portion of the subject not discovered by the other members of the class. What a means of stimulating interest, ambition, and self-respect in the pupil unaccustomed to excelling in class competition such a victory is! Here indeed is a fallow field extending to greater numbers opportunities for "social success."

Again, the syllabus offers training away from memorizing toward greater independence of thought.

Granted, then, that the syllabus method is superior to the single textbook plan, how can it be made practicable in any but the large city schools with municipal library facilities? A competent high-school librarian, with several years' experience in conducting her library under the syllabus method, stated that in the ordinary six-period day, one text would serve a minimum of five students when there were *daily* assignments from the library texts, provided the students were given the privilege of taking books home at night; when there were "hold-over" assignments, one text would serve many more than five.

Take the case of a small country high school in which there is, for example, a beginning class of ten in physics; two copies each of five different texts could be bought by this class as conveniently as ten copies of the same book, making an excellent beginning nucleus for the work. In case of a difference in price, the cost per pupil could be equalized. There would probably be little difficulty in evoking school spirit in the majority of the members of the class at the end of their course sufficiently to persuade them to donate their books to the school library. The following year a similar set of chemistry books or another different set of physics texts could be added, and so on. Within a short time there would be in the school library a sufficient variety of texts for every purpose, in many cases the books bought for one course serving the students in another.

Where the state or the district buys the books, it would be as easy to buy a few copies of several texts as a supply of just one. And doubtless school authorities would be very willing to provide the wider course facilities when it is brought home to them that the students would have the benefit of the strongest portions of several texts, no one of which, however excellent, can be strong in all respects.

In conclusion, as a "proof of the pudding," we find a deep-rooted conviction gained by many teachers through actual classroom experience with the syllabus plan, and by a large majority of their stronger students, that this method proves to be greatly superior to the textbook plan in the results it secures.